

First records of Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* for Mozambique

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Premières mentions de la Fauvette à tête noire *Sylvia atricapilla* pour le Mozambique. Le 6 décembre 2001 un mâle de la Fauvette à tête noire *Sylvia atricapilla* a été capturé au filet japonais sur le Plateau de Muretha, qui fait partie du Massif de Namuli, au nord du Mozambique. Plusieurs cris et un chant ont été entendus, permettant d'estimer qu'au moins cinq individus étaient présents. Ces données sont les premières pour le Mozambique. Les auteurs suggèrent que le Plateau de Muretha pourrait constituer un aire d'hivernage pour cette espèce.

On 1–6 December 2001, we visited the Namuli massif in northern Mozambique (15°12'S 36°52'E), spending most of our time in the Ukalini forest and on the Muretha Plateau. The objective of our visit was to gather information on the birds, through observation and mist-netting (a report on the visit can be obtained from MM). Palearctic migrants we observed included Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin* and Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* (common), and Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis* (one).

On 5–6 December we visited the Muretha Plateau. The habitat is high-altitude grassland with scattered small patches of montane forest. Upon arrival we heard several times a metallic *tacc*, repeated regularly, apparently the contact call of a Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*, but we could not confirm this as we did not see the callers and were unfamiliar with the vocalisations of the birds of the area. After we had set up a 6-m mist-net in one

of the forest patches where Garden and Willow Warblers were common, we immediately caught a male Blackcap (wing: 75.5 mm, tarsus: 23.1 mm, mass: 18.4 g; Fig. 1). Subsequently we continued hearing the contact calls and KDD once heard a song. At least five individuals were present. Two Garden Warblers were also captured. To our knowledge these are the first records of Blackcap for Mozambique.

Status and distribution

Blackcap is one of the best-studied Palearctic migrants. Its breeding population spans the Western Palearctic, reaching south-west Siberia in the east, western Norway in the north, and north-west Africa and Iran in the south (Urban *et al.* 1997, Shirihai *et al.* 2001). The species has different migratory strategies corresponding to breeding area: northern breeding populations are wholly migratory, south-western populations are partial



Figure 1. Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* trapped on the Muretha Plateau, Mozambique, December 2001 (Klaas-Douwe Dijkstra)

Fauvette à tête noire *Sylvia atricapilla* capturée sur le Plateau de Muretha, Mozambique, décembre 2001 (Klaas-Douwe Dijkstra)



Figure 2. The Muretha Plateau, looking north-east, with the Namuli Massif in the background, 6 December 2001 (M. Melo)

Le Plateau de Muretha, vu vers le nord-est, avec le Massif de Namuli en arrière-plan, 6 décembre 2001 (M. Melo)

migrants, and Atlantic and Mediterranean populations are largely resident. Most migrants winter in Africa, some in south-western Europe and a wintering population has recently become established in Great Britain. In Africa, three wintering areas can be defined: north of the Sahara, in the savannas of West Africa and in the highlands of north-east and East Africa. The southernmost wintering population is found in the mountains of Malaŵi (c.14°30'S; Urban *et al.* 1997). There are several recent records from the eastern highlands of Zimbabwe, very close to the Mozambican border (Cohen 1997). Vagrants have been reported in South Africa since 1985 (Sinclair *et al.* 1987), suggesting that the species might be a more regular visitor than currently thought. It may have been overlooked in the past due to its inconspicuous behaviour or the records could indicate an expansion of its wintering range (Cohen 1997).

The Namuli Massif

The Namuli Massif contains one of the most overlooked remnants of Eastern Arc montane forests. The ornithological importance of the area was demonstrated by an expedition in 1998, nearly 70 years after it was last visited by a naturalist (Ryan *et al.* 1999a, b). Namuli *Apalis Apalis* [*thoracica*] *lynesi*, Mozambique's only endemic bird, is restricted to this area, and two other restricted-range species, Cholo Alethe *Alethe choloensis* and Spot-throat *Modulatrix orosthrutus*, occur. All three species are of global conservation concern (Parker 2001). Our Blackcap records suggest that the Muretha Plateau (and probably other areas of the Namuli Massif as well) might constitute a wintering area for the species, as it offers a habitat typical of the winter quarters in East Africa and there is a wintering area further south, in Malaŵi.

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